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HEREDITY; ITS RELATIONSHIP
TO MENTAL DISORDERS.

BY

DR. ALEX. L. HODGDON.

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Editor American Medico-Surgical Bulletin.



HEREDITY; ITS RELATIONSHIP TO MENTAL DISORDERS.*

By Dr. ALEX. L. HODGDON.

IN dealing with the subject of Heredity in its relationship to Mental Disorders, we find that, in order to arrive at conclusions in this respect, we must look at the field in a broader light, by glancing over the conditions of Heredity *in general*. Nor must we limit ourselves to the general acceptation of the term, but, in considering the matter, must include also the inheritance of acquired peculiarities, transmitted by either parent; maternal impressions; and impressions on the general nervous system of the female through coition,—such impressions being transmitted to offspring conceived by means of another male. The percentage of cases in a number of asylums which have been ascribed to heredity is about 20%, but we must take into consideration many things outside of hereditary predisposition for successive generations, as possible and probable causes in the production of numerous cases of insanity.

To begin-with, let us take-up the particu-

* Read before the MARYLAND MEDICAL AND CHIRURGICAL FACULTY at its Annual Meeting (April 25-28, 1893).

larly interesting subject of transmission, to offspring, of

ACQUIRED PECULIARITIES.

That such transmissions may take place has been both affirmed and denied by men apparently well-versed in the literature of the subject; but that it *does* occur, would seem very probable, owing to the many cases where it *appears* to have taken place.

For instance, the Esquimaux dogs, which have for generations been deprived of their tails, are said in numerous instances to be born without tails. Dr. WILLIAM WOLF, who has circumcised about six hundred Hebrew infants, tells me that he finds about 2% of the infants he goes to circumcise have been born partially circumcised; and about 6% have arrived in the world with short foreskins.

These causes have been constantly in operation for generations; but the same thing has occurred, even where the father of the child has been circumcised in adult life, and his child has been born with a short foreskin.

Another case which has come under my observation has been that of a gentleman who, when a boy, fell on the ice, and cut a deep gash in his forehead, leaving a scar, which he still carries; his daughter was born without the sign of a scar; but his grandchild, a little girl, had a mark on her

her forehead resembling a cicatrix, which admirably illustrates the tendency toward atavism.

An interesting case is reported by Dr. R. A. LANCASTER (*), in which he says: "Mr. "O. D. M. received a pistol-shot wound in "the neck near the base of the skull; which "came near proving fatal. He finally recovered, however, except that there remains a partial paralysis of the right "side. In walking, there is a peculiar "dragging of the foot, which is quite "noticeable. Some years after the accident he was married; and, in due course "of time, a fine healthy boy was born to "them. The mother, who is a very intelligent lady, confesses that she had "some misgivings lest the babe might "have its father's acquired deformity; "which happily was not the case. A "second boy was born to them about "two years later, and this also was a "perfectly-formed child. After this, *the* "mother gave no further thought (†) to the "idea of the father's condition impressing "itself upon their offspring. About two "and a half years later, a third son was "born; and to the surprise of all—and to

* *Virginia Medical Monthly*; June, 1892.

† An interesting conclusion might be drawn from what here occurred, *after* "the mother gave no further thought" to the subject; *opposite* to what had happened while she still gave thought—warding-off the hereditability, as it were, by her fears.—[Ed.]

“none more than to the mother, for she
“had not given the possibility a thought
“in this case—he was the exact re-
“production of the father: the right leg
“and arm being somewhat drawn and
“wasted. The child is now eight years
“old; and his walk and every motion is
“precisely like his father’s, and no treat-
“ment seems to benefit him in the least.”

Dr. F. W. PORTER (*) reports a case of a Mr. R., a Methodist minister and a school-teacher, who called his attention to a deep, blue mark at the root of the nose of one of his little sons, aged five years; and remarked that every one of his children, eight in number, had the same mark at birth; which continued well-defined until about seven, when no trace of the mark remained. Mr. R. himself is now forty-six years old; and that mark, a deep blue-back one, at the root of his nose, is as distinct now as it was when received at the age of thirteen years by falling against the ledge of a large dinner-pot.

GROGNIER (†) states that he has observed that the colts whose ancestors had for many ascending generations been branded on a particular part of the body, were born with marks corresponding in situation and appearance to those made by the hot iron.

According to BLUMENBACH a man had the

* *Richmond and Louisville Journal*; March, 1875.

† “Treatise on Insanity,” Hammond.

little finger of his right hand badly injured so that it became crooked. He subsequently had several sons, each of whom had the little finger of the right hand twisted like that of their father.

I have lately seen a very interesting case of paternal transmission of an acquired peculiarity in a dog belonging to a friend. The puppy, a black-and-tan, had a bend in its tail, which gave the tail the appearance of having been fractured; upon inquiry, I found that the father of this dog had sustained a fracture of the tail when a puppy—with transmission of this peculiarity to his offspring as a result.

STANLEY HAYES, M.D. (*), in a communication to the *Lancet*, says: "I saw a skye-terrier whose skull had been fractured by a spade. She subsequently produced epileptic puppies." He also mentions that he owned a cat which had been taught to beg; which produced three different lots of kittens, some of which sat upright without being taught, or directly copying their mother.

MATERNAL IMPRESSIONS.

It is hardly worth while to touch upon this subject by bringing forward any examples of this description; as the subject has been fully illustrated by Dr.

* *Lancet*; November 13, 1886.

DABNEY's article in the "Cyclopædia of the Diseases of Children," and the journals are full of many such instances. Next in order comes an extremely interesting subject:

THE IMPRESSION MADE BY THE MALE UPON THE
GENERAL NERVOUS SYSTEM OF THE FEMALE

during the act of copulation; whereby the nerve-centers of the female may become impressed to such an extent that the writer believes, that even after many years (should she be a widow and remarry), her children by the second husband might inherit the physiognomy, general appearance, and characteristics of the first; yes, even a predisposition to insanity, had it existed in the family of the first husband. Apropos of this are many interesting cases which have occurred *among animals*.

My friend, Dr. DAVID GENESE, has given me the history of a very interesting case fully illustrating this subject, as follows: A thoroughbred female dog, English black-and-tan terrier, was mated with a "blue spitz," and mated afterwards many times with a thoroughbred black-and-tan; but in every litter by the black-and-tan there was one blue puppy like the blue spitz she was crossed-by at first; and her daughter by a thoroughbred black-and-tan had a blue puppy at each litter. This is a fact so well understood by breeders that many of them will strike the name of a registered bitch

from the lists, in case she had first of all borne pups by a mongrel dog.

Dr. WETHERBY says that sometimes young mares are very difficult to get with foal the first time, and a jack which is generally a sure getter is used; often colts which are gotten by thoroughbred stallions afterward, even to the third or fourth colt, bear strong characteristics of the mule.

So, in reviewing the subject, we find that acquired peculiarities and maternal impressions may be transmitted, as well as family traits which have been in the family for generations; and it would be wise to examine the subject critically, and see if many cases of insanity and other neuroses are not due to these causes.

To the criminologist, this is of vital interest; as, by placing the criminal under influences well-calculated to increase his bodily and mental welfare, he may be made a useful member of society, and the children which he may beget, while under such influence, may become useful citizens, as has been well illustrated by the penal colonies of Australia, where crime is no longer rampant, but peace and prosperity reign comparatively undisturbed.

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